

NY Congressmen Demand President OK Funding to Repair NY Bridges

Thursday, 02 August 2007

WASHINGTON, DC--This week's tragedy on the Interstate 35W bridge in Minnesota has called attention to the widespread disrepair of an important component of the nation's vital infrastructure. In New York State, almost 40 percent of bridges are deemed structurally deficient or obsolete by the U.S. Department of Transportation's National Bridge Inventory database. In response, members of the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure—including New York Reps. Jerrold Nadler, Tim Bishop, Brian Higgins, Michael Arcuri, and John Hall—have been working to secure funding to address these potential dangers.

In recent weeks, however, President Bush has threatened to veto the FY2008 Transportation, Housing, and Urban Development Appropriations bill, which fully funds core highway programs. This important funding helps prevent exposing the traveling public to structural vulnerabilities that may have resulted in the collapse of the I-35W Bridge in Minnesota.

"Wednesday's tragedy in Minnesota should serve as a wake up call on the safety of our nation's bridges," said Nadler, the highest ranking Committee member of the New York Delegation. "The President must support our efforts in Congress to fund programs to maintain and strengthen our nation's infrastructure. The steps we take today could help us avoid similar disasters in the future."

"Our message to the President is that we can pay now to secure our bridges, or we can pay later in terms of lives lost and far more dollars spent to rebuild bridges," Bishop said. "We urge the President to withdraw his veto threat and sign this bill."

"This week's tragedy is a shocking reminder of the importance of investing in America's infrastructure, particularly the older bridges and roadways we have here in New York," said Higgins. "I am proud to join my New York colleagues on the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee to ask the President to withdraw his threat to veto the funding needed to keep New York's bridges safe."

"After the recent tragedy in Minneapolis, it would be unconscionable for the President to veto critical investments in bridges and local transportation infrastructure," said Arcuri. "In Congress, we are taking all necessary steps to ensure the safety of local residents. The President must sign this bill and release the funding New York needs for crucial bridge upgrades."

"The tragic collapse in Minnesota should serve as a wake up call that we need to make sure that Americans are safe on our roads and bridges," said Hall. "In New York's Hudson Valley alone, there are five major bridges across the Hudson River that carry hundreds of thousands of vehicles per day. President Bush needs to stop playing politics with people's lives and sign the transportation funding bill into law now."

Today Reps. Nadler, Bishop, Higgins, Arcuri, and Hall sent the following letter to the President demanding that he not veto this essential legislation:

The Honorable George W. Bush

President of the United States

1600 Pennsylvania Ave.

Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President,

As the New York Members on the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, we write to you today in response to the catastrophic failure of the Interstate 35W Bridge in Minneapolis, Minnesota that resulted in seven deaths to date and injured dozens of others. In the wake of this tragedy, we encourage you to support the fiscal year 2008 Transportation, Housing and Urban Development (THUD) Appropriations bill in order to fully fund bridge construction, maintenance, and related programs so as to prevent similar tragedies in the future.

Since 2005, the Interstate 35W bridge has been identified as "structurally deficient" by the U.S. Department of Transportation's National Bridge Inventory database. In fact, of the nearly 600,000 existing bridges across the fifty states and U.S. territories, over 155,000 have been identified as structurally deficient or obsolete.

There are over 17,000 bridges located in our state of New York, of which more than 6,500 — or 37.5 percent — are currently identified as structurally deficient or obsolete. We hope you share our view that such a high number of bridges susceptible to damage is both unacceptable and preventable. Therefore, we strongly encourage you to fully fund important federal infrastructure programs that provide funding to maintain and reinforce bridges across the U.S.

Accordingly, we request that you reconsider your previously stated intention to veto the FY 2008 THUD appropriations bill. Assuming the conference report will fully fund bridge maintenance and highway emergency relief programs pursuant to the \$4.388 billion funding level authorized by SAFETEA-LU, we ask that you support the final House-Senate agreement when it is sent to you for your signature.

Furthermore, we hope you agree that the tragedy in Minnesota should be a reminder that our nation's transportation infrastructure is vitally important not only to the economic strength of the United States, but also to the safety and security of our nation's traveling public. Therefore, we respectfully request that you sign the FY2008 THUD Appropriations bill in order to help avert the kind of unnecessary and preventable deaths that occurred earlier this week on the I-35W Bridge.

Sincerely,

Tim Bishop

Jerrold Nadler

Member of Congress

Member of Congress

Brian Higgins

Michael Arcuri

John Hall

Member of Congress

Member of Congress

Member of Congress

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